

May 31, 1947  
Sent in long hand

Dr. D. L. Tatum  
Osborn Botanical Laboratory  
Yale University  
New Haven, Connecticut

Dear Dr. Tatum:

Lederberg's work is impressive and we are interested in further information about his background, personality and interests. Is he prepared to consider the kind of opportunity we have to offer and would he adapt himself well to the job?

Our first consideration is to get an able young research man interested in fundamental genetical problems. It is desired that he work with microorganisms, using the tools of biochemistry and biophysics. This will be a new field of effort in genetics at Wisconsin, so that there is an opportunity for a man with imagination and initiative to build a research program in accordance with his own ideas. Preliminary plans have been made for a suitably equipped laboratory and the Administration is prepared to place orders July 1. Current information is that it will require about a year to get delivery of the necessary furniture and apparatus. Until the new laboratory is ready any genetical work with microorganisms could be done only with considerable inconvenience.

A second consideration which is important at Wisconsin is that the man be able to work with other departments interested in allied problems. There are several such departments here, as you know, including Plant Pathology, Agricultural and Medical Bacteriology, Biochemistry and Veterinary Science. One may visualize the new man as building up a core program of research of his own choosing in Genetics. Sooner or later it is inevitable, however, that he will be called upon also to participate in programs centered outside this department. Some of these cooperative relationships may fit in well with the core program; others probably will not. Willingness of the geneticist to do a fair amount of team work outside his immediate group and diverging from his central interests, therefore, is required.

You are familiar with the fact that the Department of Genetics at Wisconsin is a part of the College of Agriculture. As such it is engaged in much work relating more or less directly to the farming industry. The above mentioned departments having an interest in this appointment are in the same position. Fortunately, our College Administration is thoroughly sympathetic with basic research and has a fine record in support for it. But it must at all times see to it that a strong position is maintained in that part of its program which serves the farmer more directly. The welfare of the two lines of work, in a sense, are related. What I mean to say is that the opportunity for research in plant genetics, for example, is enhanced in the long run if the farming public feels that it is being well served at the same time by the plant breeder and the crop technologist. And so with other fields in the College. One whose primary interest is in research in some phase of biology underlying agriculture should have an understanding of the work of his more farm-minded colleagues and be willing to aid them as circumstances dictate. The desired relationship is not dissimilar to that between the researcher and the clinician in a medical school. There are several first-rate

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research men on our College staff who have established very satisfactory working relationships in this respect. It is our hope that we can get another one for the position in question.

It might be pointed out that there are numerous inter-college cooperative undertakings in research at Wisconsin. Biochemistry, for example, has some with the Cancer Laboratory and other divisions of the Medical School. The Graduate School cuts directly across College lines and W.A.R.F. funds are placed when research is being done regardless of Administrative boundaries.

There may be a call sooner or later for a formal course in the genetics of microorganisms. It would be expected that the new man would handle this. For the present, however, teaching responsibilities would probably be limited to the two advanced genetics courses under Dr. Irwin's direction, which are given in alternate years and contributed to by several of us. This statement is subject to the qualification mentioned in my letter of May 26; namely, that as a result of Professor Owen's recent decision to go to Cal Tech we are seeking a man also to handle the elementary genetics teaching. Conceivably the latter assignment might be linked with the position in microbiology if we found a man interested in such a combination.

The initial appointment would probably be as assistant professor. About a year ago when the matter was first discussed with Dean Baldwin a yearly salary of \$3500 was suggested. I cannot say without further consultation whether in view of the increase in cost of living which has occurred since there would be an upward adjustment now. The legislative appropriation for the coming biennium has not yet been made but the current outlook is good.

We would like to have your frank judgment concerning Lederberg's probable interest in the sort of opportunity I have outlined and his ability to fit into the Wisconsin pattern. His contacts in applied science to date I assume have been with medicine. Could he make himself at home in a college of agriculture? What would be his reaction if O. H. Allen in Agricultural Bacteriology, for example, sought his help in studies on the heritable variation in the Rhizobia and their respective hosts along the lines of the recent Rothamsted work, or if Snell working on nutrition of the bacteria in Biochemistry desired his cooperation? Is he a good team man? Would he be patient enough to build a genetics program with microorganisms starting from scratch? Is he the kind of man who could overcome as an individual the prejudice against his race, which he doubtless would encounter occasionally here as in many other universities? I believe that his immediate colleagues in genetics here would do their full share in facilitating his efforts in these directions. Is Lederberg married? I ask this because the housing situation here is no better than in most other places.

Sincerely yours,

R. A. Brink  
Professor of Genetics